

The Vocation of the Laity

– from the writings of Joseph Cardijn

Each Christian, each Catholic, by his baptism, must be an apostle and a missionary – he has an apostolic and missionary vocation. Each one is called by God to existence, to life and to a collaboration in his creative and redemptive work. The earthly vocation is an apostolic and missionary vocation...

Workers must know what is their vocation. They have a divine vocation, a mission which no one else can fulfil. Without that mission, the work of creation and redemption cannot be completed. ... That is why the poorest of workers can be called by God to become a pope, a bishop, a priest, a monk, a missionary, a saviour of humanity, because each has, without exception, a divine vocation.

The worker has a divine vocation in his work. It is work that must continue God's act of creation, make use of the creation, discover all the riches within creation, and place them at the disposal of humanity, in order that it may attain its destiny. Without work there is nothing, neither moral, intellectual, or religious. Without work there is no Host, not a single drop of wine to consecrate, no altar stone, no vestments, no Church. Without work there is no religion. There is no kingdom of God without work, and therefore work must be respected and treated with dignity, honour and justice.

The mystery of vocation is so profound and important a truth that we cannot understand it with our unaided reason. We have to meditate on it. The Holy Spirit must enlighten us as to its meaning, which is eternal, divine and decisive for the world.

A vocation is not enthusiasm or sentiment, any more than it is a need to give and dedicate oneself. ... The

essential nature of a vocation is that it comes from God. It is a call from God addressed to a soul, giving it to understand what God expects. The word 'vocation' is the Latin for 'call', and by a vocation God calls someone. The fulfilment of a vocation is humanity's answer to this call from God.



God calls everyone without exception. Each human person, however poor or humble he may be, is called by God. Because the greater part of humanity does not hear this call, God has sent his only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to make them listen. For that reason he was willing to die for them. Unceasingly he goes on calling all.

This call of God is for a life. Our Lord asks our life of us. He asks us to give it by transforming it into his: 'it is no longer I, but Christ living in me' (Gal 2:20). Thus a vocation transforms and consecrates the whole life of those who are called and who answer the call by allowing the life of Christ to grow in them.

The call demands also that we should be witnesses to Christ. We must bear witness to Christ, not by words only, not by some deeds only, but by the whole of our life, by our generosity and

charity in all the acts of our life. We bear witness to Christ in all the actions of the day, witness to his charity and generosity, to his desire to save men.

The purpose of a vocation is eternal as well as divine. ... The temporal purpose is only a means, necessary as it is, to the eternal end. Thus a worker must defend, help, protect the workers; but the purpose of his life is not to give them more money or more free time. He is not labouring to obtain them a few years of material well-being on earth, but an eternity of happiness in heaven. If he is an apostle, such is the revolution he desires.

Challenge to Action

Reflections

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Our society is all about fast everything and taking the time out for this reflection can seem strange. Maybe that is why although it is sometimes the difficult part it is also the most valuable for making sense of what is really going on.

So if you could give me any advice as a worker new to YCW what would it be?

To remember that it is about empowering Christian leaders in life. Leadership training for both the adult companions and young people is essential. Always give tasks to bring out an individual's skill base and empower the adult companions to do this as well.

Never worry about numbers either, YCW is not a numbers game, it's about forming young leaders to live and engage with life in a Christian way. Keep a journal on the positives that you have achieved each day (no matter how small). Always reflect, because this is where growth comes from, remember that we are always given challenges for a reason and be patient with yourself. And finally, pray and don't worry!

REAL LIFE

The Journal of the Young Christian Workers

Joseph Cardijn in his wisdom often said that we are always at the beginning. In order to stay relevant, to read the signs of the times, we need to be open to adaptation, to change and to be changed. If we are not open to this process of rebirth, of creativity, of recommitment then the danger is we stagnate and fail to grow as individuals and as a community. Beginning again, being

"we are always at the beginning"

open to change, is often challenging and scary because it means going out of our comfort zones and risking something new, perhaps alien or different. In John's Gospel Jesus says, 'I tell you most solemnly, unless a wheat grain falls on the ground and dies, it remains only a single grain' (Jn 12:24). Just as nature has a circular pattern of death and regeneration, so Jesus reminds us, we need to go through the same process of renewal and growth. Theologians remind the Church of the necessity of *ecclesia semper reformanda* or a Church always ready to reform itself, to recommit itself, according to the signs of the times, to more effectively evangelise and sanctify our world.

However, just as nature has evolved its own patterns of regeneration and growth through centuries of development, so the Church has throughout history developed its tradition based on the sure foundations of the revelation of God's love made present in the person of Jesus Christ. The message of the Gospel is unchanging, what changes is how the Church makes this message relevant to people of different ages, cultures and experiences. The Word of God is alive and active, it is as dynamic as the God who continues to inspire and reveal Godself in the lives of individuals, and the Church community as a whole. As disciples of Jesus we are called to respond to this active, alive God who plants Godself in the midst of our daily lives. This means recognising God revealed to us in our daily lives, in the midst of our friendships, our work, our family life, and our leisure time. What is this alive, dynamic God calling us to do today? How can we be disciples of Jesus today, in this time and moment? How can we bring the changeless values of the Gospel into the fast-moving and changing cultures that we find ourselves in, and make it relevant, fresh, and alive?

At the heart of our charism as the YCW is the Truth of Method, designed to equip us to respond to God revealing Godself in the midst of our daily reality. Seeing, judging and acting is a spirituality rooted in the Christian understanding of God truly incarnated into our reality, i.e. God alongside us, in the mess, chaos, beauty and struggle of human existence. If we take this spirituality seriously we cannot but be changed by this process of discernment, of challenge, of daily recommitment to be a disciple of Christ, someone who is called to bring the Gospel into the midst of our daily lives. It is our tool to keep relevant, to keep real, to keep reforming our Church and world, so slowly the Reign of God is revealed in and through us to others. So, in

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a sense if our Review of Life is working, each time we meet, we continue to be renewed as individuals, as a Movement, and as a Church because we should not be exactly the same person at the start of the meeting as at the end. Hopefully we have been challenged to think about something differently, to act differently, to recommit ourselves in the struggle for justice, to see God anew in the midst of our shared experiences. To begin again.

Thus it is with this publication. A new beginning, but firmly rooted in the traditions that have gone before, to attempt to make *Real Life* relevant to its readership and practical in its support of the YCW Movement. The change to the format is pragmatic, in trying to ensure the most economical means of production, to help ensure the editorship team have enough time to plan, collate and produce a regular publication, and to meet the needs of the various people within the Movement who find it of value. Thus *Real Life* has given birth, so to speak, to two offshoots: *Accompanier* and *The YCW*. *Real Life* will continue to be a mixture of articles and testimonies from current YCW members and Adult Companions/Chaplains, news items informing the membership of current events, and archive articles reminding us of the rich vein of teaching of Joseph Cardijn. This will be distributed to all

subscribers. *Accompanier* as suggested in its title, is a supplement publication for the support and on-going formation of those in the Movement who accompany our young people. *The YCW* is designed for the young people within the Movement and will be their vehicle for sharing news and opinions.

Another change has been in the editorship team. I have agreed to take on the editorship of *Real Life* and *Accompanier* together with Patricia Hardcastle Kelly, who generously has given much of her time and skill already. Many thanks go to her for her energy and enthusiasm. I am aware that I am following in the esteemed footsteps of Fr. Brendan Hoban, who gave a considerable amount of his time and energy to the re-launch and collation of *Real Life* in recent years. I would like to offer my personal thanks to Fr. Brendan for all his hard work and dedication to this project.

"the YCW has something relevant and vibrant to offer our young people"

I realise that this edition will mean a considerable change in format, but I hope it will be found to meet the various needs of its readership. I would really appreciate your suggestions as to what you would like to see covered in *Real Life/Accompanier*, as well as articles and testimonies. It can be a struggle to find material to fill the publication, so we would love to hear from you, and the experiences and wisdom you can share with the rest of the Movement.

New beginnings offer fresh challenges. The YCW is entering a new and exciting phase with the launch of our national project, *Leading Life*. We know that the YCW has something relevant and vibrant to offer our young people within the Church community and beyond it. Let's unite in solidarity, within prayer, within action, to work together for the future of the Movement within England and Wales. We have a word in Italian, *coraggio*, a word often used by Pope Paul VI to encourage and fire up those to whom he addressed. It means more than the literal translation 'courage'. It means stand up, be proud, persevere, go for it! Let us have this sense of mission as YCWs present and past, not to fear change, but to embrace it.

Fr Geoff

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YCW
The Difference
is You

Introducing the Editors

Fr Geoff Munnery



I am a priest of the Archdiocese of Southwark. I have been a priest now for just over 10 years, serving in 2 parishes (Gravesend and Tooting) and currently as chaplain to Southwark Catholic Youth Service. I have been involved with the YCW for 11 years, acting as Regional Chaplain to Southwark for the majority of that time, as well as assisting at a National level together with the other regional chaplains. This year I was asked to assist Fr. Michael Jones in his role as National Chaplain to the Movement. I have been acting as sub-editor to *Real Life* since its re-launch several years ago.

Patricia Hardcastle Kelly

I am 36, married, and live in North Yorkshire. I work from home as a freelance editor and translator, which is how I have recently come to know the YCW. Next year I hope to start a part-time PhD in theology, studying the laity in the contemporary Church; one of my areas of focus will be the 'Cardijn movements'.

With a degree in French and Music, I began working in medical publishing, based in Oxford, and then moved to the Bishops' Conference, based in London. I heard little or nothing about the YCW during that time – what I did hear was usually accompanied by the rider that 'it's not well-known in this country'.

A couple of years ago, my husband and I bumped into Fr John Marsland in Rome – we had both known him when he was at the English College – and, over a glass of wine, he told us about his work for the ICYCW. Perhaps rashly, I offered to help out pro bono if my skills would be any use; Fr John's eyes lit up and I have been helping on and off ever since, initially with the ICYCW and now with the YCW too. I really struggled to start with, translating minutes – so not full sentences – of meetings in an organisation I didn't understand at all – I wasn't familiar with the ideas, so often I might as well have been translating Greek for all I understood of the original!

Fr John was kind and patient about the 'translations' I sent back, which often had a lot of highlighted text marking what I had been unable to translate!

In March 2007, I went to Barcelona to interpret for the International Chaplains meeting: a fantastic, utterly exhausting week! My initial nerves weren't helped by trying to interpret from the car radio as I was driving to the airport, but I received a warm welcome, particularly when I offered to help with the preparations, having arrived a day early! The testimonies given by both chaplains and YCW members were deeply humbling and moving, particularly those from the Philippines and Peru, which I was relieved not to be interpreting, as it's difficult to interpret when you are choked up. I talked a lot with the delegates from central Africa, where I was born and lived until I was 10. Hearing first-hand the very real struggle that most people in the world face just to live a life of the most basic human dignity for which we are all created really puts the relatively comfortable existence that most of us in England & Wales enjoy into perspective. I was truly inspired by what I saw, heard and learnt; impressed at the humble generosity of the chaplains and YCW members; deeply moved by the testimonies and our prayer together.

In August I went to Paris to interpret for the European YCW members meeting. The warm, genuine welcome from the England & Wales delegation made the weekend truly special, and I was once more deeply inspired and impressed. Somehow, despite a lack of common languages (when interpreters weren't available!), everyone managed to communicate and, most importantly, laugh and joke together. What really stands out for me is how cheerful and enthusiastic everyone was – no matter how tired they were, how hard they had been working, whatever their home circumstances and personal anxieties, everyone was unfailingly kind to each other, and the meeting was full of laughter and real joy in the risen Lord. St Paul would be proud!

The fruits of these two meetings were professional and personal: suddenly what I am translating makes sense; and I am glad to offer my skills in whatever way they can best be used to help the YCW develop.

Fr Geoff once said that he felt I had 'found a little niche of happiness' helping with the YCW – and he is absolutely right! I am convinced that our work – be it searching for employment, a paid job, studies or

schoolwork, depending on our status and stage in life – is a fundamental part of our existence. 'God said, "let us make man in our own image, in the likeness of ourselves"' (Gen 1:24), and immediately tells us to "fill the earth and subdue it." (Gen 1:28) The Church Fathers, writing in the first few centuries AD, remind us that we were created both to worship God, and to work, just as God did to complete creation (Gen 2:1). Jesus worked as a carpenter (Mk 6:3); Paul urges the Thessalonians to 'attend to [their] business and earn [their] living' (1 Thess 4:11). Jesus' parables use images of everyday life, and especially work – the shepherd looking after his flock, the housewife sweeping her house, the farmer planting and reaping his crop... Right from the beginning of the Church, day to day work was as important a part of the Christian experience as daily prayer.



On my journey I have been helped to value my work, my search for work, my study, because my work is one of the two things I have been created to do – the other, of course, being to come close to God. While I am sorry that I didn't come across the YCW when I was young enough to be a member, I am humbled and privileged that the National Team and Fr Geoff have the confidence in me to ask me to help with producing *Real Life* and *Accompanier*.

The YCW still has something so precious to offer young people, whether they are studying, seeking work, or working. The belief that they are 'worth more than all the gold in the world'; the 'See-Judge-Act', which helps them deal with their crises, small and large, which are an inevitable part of life; helping them to make a real, positive difference in their own lives, in the lives of their peers, and in their communities. Perhaps now more than ever, in a world of unstable, poorly-paid jobs which rarely use all their abilities, and a lack of respect from society reflected back through a media which treats them with suspicion, they desperately need the hope and the help that the YCW can give them. So let's give them all we can – they deserve it!

Reflections of a President

Anne Marie Johnson (nee Finnigan) is a former YCW National President. Here, Sara Conway interviews her about her memories and experiences of her journey before, during and after the YCW.

How did you get involved initially with YCW?

It was through my Dad really. He had been a YCW member himself during the 1960s and was a great supporter of it. As I and my siblings approached our teens, he was convinced we needed to start up a new YCW group for the young people in our area. I thought it sounded old even back then! When we finally got something started it was at Our Lady's and English Martyrs in Urmston in 1983. I only went along to see what it was about and the rest is history! There were about twenty of us in the end, and we all really enjoyed the local actions and making a difference. There used to be a strong regional presence and the President, Treasurer and Secretary from each group would meet together to discuss what issues were affecting their group. It soon became clear that similar issues were arising within regions and so the study day was born! A regional study day was a chance to meet with other groups of young people and have a whole day together to discuss key issues together (always followed by Mass and a disco!).

Was there one pivotal moment where it all just clicked into place?

There were many moments I think and it is really difficult to identify just one. Actually I do remember that after about a year and a half of attending YCW at Our Lady's, we decided that I would start up my own group in my home parish as well. Unfortunately the priest thought we were young communists and did not allow us to use the church, so we began meeting in my parents' front room.

There were just four of us for the first few weeks. I remember walking to the local shop one night and passing some lads I knew from school (but never really spoke to because they were too 'hard'). These lads started saying 'Is it true you are running this Christian thing for young people... YCW or something?' I was terrified and muttered yes, then told them it was at my house and they could have tea and biscuits if they came along. I think they laughed. I never expected to see them again, but sure enough the next week these lads arrived with some friends and piled into the house!

There were about ten of them and to my mum's horror they used to hang out of our windows and have a cigarette during the meetings. We met for over three years in my parents' front room and these lads became regular group members, much to my amazement.

When I reflect back now, YCW was really for guys like these I have mentioned. They were in the workplace, unemployed, young people, taking positive action to change their lives and the lives of others. I never knew how many one-to-one chats my Dad (as our Adult Companion) used to have with them until his funeral 9 years ago. The same lads turned up to pay their respects and one in particular told the family that if had not have been for the group and my dad listening to him, he would have been dead by now. Apparently he was thinking of committing suicide and my Dad's time and energy spent with him gave him hope for life and for his future. They all agreed that YCW, and particularly my Dad, had changed their lives.

There were many more key moments I experienced as an area worker for the YCW. I think it was when I saw the power the process has on young peoples' lives that I was really touched. I remember a Drugs Awareness day that we held in the Shrewsbury diocese. (All of our local enquiries at the time identified drugs as a key factor in the young peoples' realities.) We invited two young ex-heroin addicts along to the day to talk to the young people about their reality, their experiences as an addict. Seeing these young men stand up tall, amazed that so many people wanted to hear their stories, and feeling valued and empowered by being given that responsibility was inspiring. I also remember a young person called Bernadette Phoenix (now a good personal friend). She was so shy when a parish priest identified her as having potential to be president of the group. When she began to attend leaders' training events and was asked to speak at events I saw her grow and blossom in confidence and develop great skills as a group leader. The pride that she showed in her group and the difference they had made to their community was wonderful to see and a true transformation.

How do you combine YCW into your life now?

I think the See-Judge-Act-Review method is something I do subconsciously and automatically now. Seeing my reality

helps me identify my role as a mum now. In making sense of my situation as a wife and mum, I often think of offering God all my 'work, my hopes and struggles, my joys and sorrows'. Sometimes when I have had a hard week with the boys there seem to be a lot of struggles! I believe my responsibility is the formation of my children at this moment in time. Through the method I have an opportunity to reflect upon how much family time I have had the chance for in the last week. The skills I learnt of reflection help me to make an informed decision on what action to take. I am also fully aware of life around me, of the other mums in my community, taking time to see where there may be an opportunity for sharing experiences together and taking action there.

So how has YCW changed your life?

Unbelievably! It has changed the way I approach situations and reflect on decisions. I was at a friend's 40th birthday the other night and as I looked around the table I was sitting at, I realised that all 14 of us were friends through YCW! Not only that, but the genuine quality of the friendships was amazing. We all think in a YCW way, we are open to unpacking ideas and not narrow-minded. We all try to live out the YCW in our current situations and therefore are not selfish and always have time for others. In my darker moments it is these people that have reached out a hand to me, without judging, it's faith coming alive and active. The decisions we make are reflected on in the light of faith. I still belong to a review of life group myself and this has supported me through the darker times too. My friends help me see the need for prayer and reflection in life. Through this process, we know that we have the confidence faith and power to change a situation.

So what, if anything, did you find difficult about the method of See-Judge-Act-Review?

I think taking action is sometimes the hardest part of the method. To be self-motivated to actually change something (especially in your own life) and to be able to motivate young people at the same time is demanding.

Also relating things to scripture and the Gospel enquiries part of the method can be difficult. I think this is because we are so used to everything in life happening 'now'.